

SELECTIVE SERVICE LOTTERY

If and when the Congress and the President reinstate a military draft, the Selective Service System would conduct a National Draft Lottery to determine the order in which young men would be drafted.

The lottery would establish the priority of call based on the birth dates of registrants. The first men drafted would be those turning age 20 during the calendar year of the lottery. For example, if a draft were held in 1998, those men born in 1978 would be considered first. If a young man turns 21 in the year of the draft, he would be in the second priority, in turning 22 he would be in the third priority, and so forth until the year in which he turns 26 at which time he is over the age of liability. Younger men would not be called in that year until men in the 20-25 age group are called.

Because of the enormous impact of this lottery, it would be conducted publicly, with full coverage by the media. Accredited observers from public interest groups will have full access to observe the proceedings.

To make the lottery as fair as possible, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) developed a unique random calendar and number selection program for Selective Service. Using this random selection method for birthdays, each day of the year is selected by computer in a random manner, and that date is placed in a capsule. The capsules are then loaded in a large drum on a random basis. By the same method, numbers from 1 to 365 (366 for men born in a leap year) are also selected in a random fashion, placed in capsules, and the capsules are placed into a second drum. The process, repeated a second time, results in two sets of drums. Official observers certify that the capsule-filling and drum-loading were conducted according to established procedures. This certification is secured to each drum; they are sealed and placed in secure storage. Should a lottery be conducted, one of the first actions would be an inspection of these stored drums and the selection of a set to be used in the lottery.

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Here is how the lottery would work: One capsule is drawn from the drum containing birth dates January 1 through December 31. One capsule is then drawn from the drum containing the sequence numbers from 1 through 365 (366 if the draft will call men born during a leap year) and the date and number are paired to establish the sequence number for each birth date. This is done in full view of all observers, officials, and the media.

For example, if the date of August 4 is drawn first from the “date” drum, and the sequence number of 32 is drawn from the “number’s” drum at the same time, then those men turning 20 on August 4 would be ordered for induction processing only after men whose birthdays drew sequence numbers 1 through 31. The drawings continue until all 365 (or 366) birthdays of the year are paired with a sequence number.

After the lottery is completed and results certified, the sequence of call is transmitted to the Selective Service System’s Data Management Center. Almost immediately the first induction notices are prepared and sent via mailgram to men whose birth dates drew the lowest lottery numbers.

This system, based on random selection of birth dates, with the order of priority for reporting assigned in a scientifically random manner, is a fair and equitable method of calling men to serve.